

5 June 1978

Writers & Writing

WITHOUT CLOAKS OR DAGGERS

BY DANIEL SCHORR

① P. 1 C. 2
P. 2
② full
medley
C

THAT OLD GRAY memoir, she ain't what she used to be. The cool twilight recollection of ancient battles has been replaced—at least on the government-conspiracy front—by late afternoon salvos from vanquished combatants who have one eye on the market, the other on the target. So Bob Haldeman snipes at Charles Colson, John Ehrlichman at Richard Nixon, Richard Nixon at everybody and cruel fate. And all of them blame each other—and the CIA—for our national trauma.

Their books sell well because we feel that we have not yet gotten to the bottom of the matter, that maybe the next memoir will answer the still unanswered questions. But as the volumes accumulate they merely seem to add to the mystery, reinforcing an impression that Watergate was only one incident in a more complex and longer-lasting abuse of governmental power than we had imagined. The names of Richard Helms, Fidel Castro, John F. Kennedy, Lee Harvey Oswald, Howard Hughes, James Angleton and Nixon swirl in some turbulent eddy; a line from Watergate leads back to the Bay of Pigs, from there to Vietnam; the CIA's Operation Phoenix, against guerrillas in Vietnam, merges with Operation Chaos, against dissenters in America. There has been a strange interplay between the visible government in the White House and the invisible government of intelligence—the schemes of politicians crossing the schemes of spymasters—and in the hidden recesses of power bitter conflicts erupt of which we know virtually nothing.

One of these has been a struggle for the soul of America's espionage empire. It is illumined in the latest of the memoirs, *Honorable Men* (Simon and Schuster, 493 pp., \$12.95), the first authoritative view from inside the CIA. The author, William E. Colby, had the dubious fortune of

being swept into the office of Director of Central Intelligence in 1973 by the backwash of Watergate. James Schlesinger, who succeeded the ousted Richard Helms, was suddenly moved to the Pentagon to replace Elliot Richardson, who was replacing ousted Attorney General Richard Kleindienst. It was Colby's conception that, in the post-Watergate atmosphere, the CIA had to be brought out of its cave into the daylight of legality; that led to a conflict with subordinates and superiors, and eventually got him ousted as well.

From early on in his tenure, Colby found himself at odds with the other OSS veterans who peopled the CIA. He was not one of those who "cliqued together, forming a sealed fraternity . . . increasingly separated themselves from the ordinary world and developed a rather skewed view of that world . . . an inbred, distorted, elitist view of intelligence that held it to be above the normal processes of society." Perhaps he was able to maintain his distance because his wife, Barbara, made sure "my off hours were filled with normal affairs having nothing to do with secret operations," though I suspect more was involved than that.

Still, Colby was enough a part of the "sealed fraternity" to perceive a problem of "flap potential" rather than morality when a post-Watergate internal investigation uncovered improper activities such as mail-opening, drug experiments on unwitting subjects, surveillance of antiwar protesters, and assassination conspiracies. To limit the damage, he ordered these practices discontinued or phased out. (Instructions to redirect the surveillance operation were

CONTINUED

ignored, for they were misconstrued as a new cover story—an example of how far the institutionalized wink can go.)

However, the time when the CIA could correct its mistakes and cover its tracks without telling anyone—including the President—was about to end. The catalysts were disillusioned officers and former officers privy to information in the Inspector-General's report, wryly titled "The Family Jewels." Some of the jewels landed on the front page of the *New York Times* in a story by Seymour Hersh that plunged the once-immune agency into a nightmare of investigation and obloquy.

Colby's recommended strategy for coping with the deteriorating situation—public confession of past misdeeds and emphasis on safeguards for the future—was vetoed by President Gerald Ford, who refused to release the explanatory report the CIA director prepared for publication. Feathers were then ruffled when Colby, heeding the obstruction of justice warning of Acting Attorney General Lawrence Silberman, turned over files for possible prosecution—implicating Helms, among others. Colby's testimony before a "blue ribbon" commission—whose purpose was "to still the outcry and thus prevent a full investigation" by Congress—was so forthcoming that the chairman, Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller, admonished him, "Bill, do you really have to present all this material to us?" He was reprimanded for not consulting the White House before authorizing release of a statement to a Senate committee, and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger needed Colby, an observant Catholic, by suggesting that "when you go up to the Hill, . . . you go to confession."

Small wonder, given these circumstances, that Colby fell victim to the "Sunday morning massacre" of November 1, 1975, for going too far in his effort to purge his agency of its past misdeeds: There were simply too many people still around, like Kissinger and Helms, who felt threatened by his candor (although it was Ford's own indiscretion at a press luncheon that exposed the assassination plots, the biggest secret of all). Colby avoids discussing who did him in and why; in fact, he generally glosses over personal conflict and shuns vendettas. Depersonalizing issues is probably part of being an intelligence professional—"the traditional gray man," as he describes himself.

But there is one villain in his book—the individual who personified the "old guard" in the central struggle. He is James Angleton, who had headed CIA counterintelligence since the Agency was created. Angleton, operationally subtle and ideologically simplistic, has already fired off his own rocket by proxy, through Edward Jay Epstein's book, *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*. That depicts Angleton as having been fired in December 1974 because he refused to accept the authenticity of a Soviet defector named Yuri Nosenko—a heavily symbolic issue.

Nosenko was the KGB officer whose 1964 defection seemed a shade too coincidental when he turned up in Geneva, 10 weeks after President Kennedy's assassination, with word that he had handled the Oswald file in Moscow

and could give assurance that the assassin had no KGB connection. After working him over for three years, the CIA finally concluded that he was authentic. Angleton maintained—and maintains—that Nosenko was a KGB plant. Epstein suggests that his real mission was to divert attention from Oswald's prior connections with the KGB, and therefore that the CIA's continued use of Nosenko as an informant represents blindness, or worse, Soviet penetration of the Agency.

Colby, who never mentions Nosenko, says he fired Angleton when he came to realize the counterintelligence chief was doing more harm than good. He contends, for example, that two CIA officers were irresponsibly tagged as possible Russian agents, that spies behind the Iron Curtain were undermined by being branded as double-agents, that valid information and useful defectors were rejected. Because of Angleton, says Colby, the CIA turned down, as a suspected provocateur, the biggest Soviet catch in history—Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, who was eagerly scooped up by British intelligence. Moreover, writes Colby, "Angleton had never accepted the Sino-Soviet split as genuine," and under his influence, "we seemed to be putting more emphasis on the KGB as CIA's adversary than on the Soviet Union as the United States' adversary."

BY HIS PORTRAIT of Angleton, Colby has brought into focus an issue that reaches beyond the intelligence community—namely, the counterintelligence syndrome in American life, which tends to define the unknown as hostile, the enemy as omnipotent. Inward-looking, it concentrates on what "they" are doing to us, sometimes at the expense of what we could do to "them." In its broadest sense, fear of penetration prompted the internment of the Nisei after Pearl Harbor, Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch-hunt, and the FBI's warrantless—and mostly unwarranted—break-ins on obscure Left-wing groups. For Nixon, the danger of penetration remains the justification for the admittedly illegal Tom Charles Huston surveillance plan.

This world view is found in particularly concentrated form in the CIA's "sealed fraternity." Colby proposes that it should finally be unsealed. "Intelligence," he says, "must accept the end of its special status in the American government. . . . The public can no longer be expected to follow Helms' 1971 admonition that it 'must take it on faith that we too are honorable men devoted to the nation's service.' " It is clearly with intentional irony that the author draws his conclusion, and his title, from his disingenuous adversary who wears his deceptions as a "badge of honor." For William Colby must be, by all odds, the most candid American spymaster in history. One suspects that, in his proposals to place intelligence under Constitutional controls, he will have more influence with the American public than with the intelligence community that made him the odd man out.